

In the claims: The claims are as follows.

1. (Previously presented) An apparatus for use in providing user inputs to a communication or computing device, comprising:

an input button provided as a flattened shape lying in or on and nearly flush with a surface of the communication or computing device so as to have an exposed surface and having a cavity or receptacle formed on the exposed surface for receiving an end portion of an indicator instrument unattached to the input button, and for receiving a force exerted on the input button via the indicator instrument; and

means disposed proximate to the receptacle for detecting the force exerted on the input button based on the input button moving or deforming in response to the force, and for providing a signal corresponding to the force.

2. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the means for detecting the force exerted on the input button comprises a strain sensor.

3. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the means for detecting the force exerted on the input button comprises a sensor that transmits a signal corresponding to the force at least in respect to the direction of the force.

4. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the means for detecting the force exerted on the input button comprises a sensor that transmits a signal corresponding to the force at least in respect to the magnitude of the force.

5. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the means for detecting the force exerted on the input button

comprises a sensor that transmits a signal until the force is removed.

6. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button moves or deforms so as to communicate to the means for detecting the force exerted on the input button a signal corresponding to a user action selected from the set consisting of clicking, scrolling, selecting, pointing, cursor positioning, key pressing or typing, and joystick manipulating.

7. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button moves or deforms so as to communicate a force lying along the surface of the communication or computing device.

8. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button moves or deforms so as to communicate a force directed orthogonally to the surface of the communication or computing device.

9. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button is so shaped as to allow imparting a force couple via the indicator instrument and so tending to cause a change in pitch of the input button relative to the surface of the communication or computing device, and wherein the input button moves or deforms so as to communicate the force couple.

10. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the input button and means for detecting the force exerted on the input button are in combination provided as a box-in-box construction including an outer box and an inner box, the inner box provided as the flattened shape having the indentation formed on the exposed surface, and the outer box having sensing means responsive to forces applied to the inner box via the end portion

of the indicator instrument, for providing a corresponding signal indicating a user input.

11. (Previously presented) A method for acquiring user inputs to a communication or computing device, comprising:

a receptacle of an input button lying in or on a surface of the communication or computing device receiving an end portion of an indicator instrument unattached to the input button, wherein the input button is a flattened shape lying in or on and nearly flush with a surface of the communication or computing device so as to have an exposed surface and having a cavity or receptacle formed on the exposed surface for receiving the end portion of the indicator instrument; and

the input button moving or deforming in response to a force or a force couple exerted on the input button via the end portion of the indicator instrument.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the moving or deforming of the input button is a sliding motion.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the moving or deforming of the input button is a rocking motion caused by applying a force couple to the input button via the indicator instrument.

14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the moving or deforming of the input button is a motion into or out of the surface of the communication or computing device.

15. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the moving or deforming of the input button is a motion substantially in the plane of the surface of the communication or computing

device.

16. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the indicator instrument is used to provide user inputs that would otherwise be provided using a keyboard.

17. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 10, wherein the inner box is so shaped as to allow imparting a force couple via the indicator instrument and so tending to cause a change in pitch of the input button relative to the surface of the communication or computing device, and wherein the sensing means are for providing a signal indicative of the force couple.

18. (Previously presented) A communication or computing device comprising an apparatus as in claim 1, and further comprising the indicator instrument and an indicator holder for storing the indicator when the indicator is not in use, wherein the indicator holder is attached to the side of the communication or computing device or integrated into a cover for the communication or computing device, and is shaped so as to allow snapping to a holding position when the indicator is pressed onto the holder.

19. (Previously presented) An apparatus for use in providing user inputs to a communication or computing device, comprising:

an input button provided as a flattened shape lying in or on and nearly flush with a surface of the communication or computing device so as to have an exposed surface and having a cavity or receptacle formed on the exposed surface for receiving an end portion of an indicator instrument unattached to the input button, and for receiving a force exerted on the input button via the indicator instrument; and

a sensor array disposed proximate to the receptacle for detecting the force exerted on the input button based on the input button moving or deforming in response to the force, and for providing a signal corresponding to the force.

20. (Previously presented) An apparatus as in claim 19, wherein the sensor array comprises a plurality of strain sensors.